

BASIC PRINCIPLES OF CHILD GUIDANCE

(Based Upon Adlerian Psychology and the Writings
of Rudolf Dreikurs)

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BASIC PRINCIPLES OF CHILD GUIDANCE

These principles are designed to help parents understand children and how to deal with them more effectively. Many of the principles apply to all human relationships, not only to those between parents and children. Mothers who learn to become effective in dealing with their children often find they can improve their relationship with their husbands by using similar approaches. Naturally even the best method does not prevent conflict nor guarantee success. Nevertheless, a mother who is acquainted with these principles and knows what to do and why, is in a better position to deal with a given situation effectively and for the best interest of the child.

1. Encouragement

Every child needs constant encouragement. Encouragement implies your faith in the child and communicates to him your belief in his strength and ability. Unless you have faith in him as he is, you cannot encourage him.

2. The Law of Natural Consequences

Since you no longer have the power to control the child and to enforce your will directly upon him, learn to utilize the situation which can exert the necessary pressure to stimulate proper motivation. The child understands reality and its demands, provided you do not protect him from unpleasant consequences when he disturbs order. Interfering with the consequences of a disturbed order deprives the child of corrective experiences and hinders his learning to respect reality and order. Only in moments of real danger is it necessary to save the child from the natural consequences of his disturbing behaviour. Anger, retaliatory intent and

punitive considerations turn the least possible natural consequences into punishment and thereby deprive it of its effectiveness in stimulating proper motivation. The techniques for proper use of natural consequences are not easy to learn.

3. A Conflict Situation Requires Action And Not Words

Talking means communication. In a moment of conflict or clash of interests talking is not communication, but warfare. Words are used as weapons and therefore, cannot evoke favorable responses. All corrective verbal efforts are ill-advised. Effective action in the moment of conflict can consist of natural consequences, physical motion or, if these are not possible, self removal from the scene. Words should not be used as disciplinary means.

4. Take Time For Training

Time must be set aside for training a child in different performances. Teaching the child essential skills or habits requires definite instruction and training.

5. Use Firmness Without Domination

Your firmness will gain you the child's respect, while, your domination will make him rebellious.

6. Efficacy Of Withdrawal

Withdrawing from the scene when the child demands undue attention or tries to involve you in a power contest is a most effective training tactic. Withdrawal is not surrender; it is effective counter-action.

7. The Fallacy Of First Impulses

Acting as we feel compelled, we do not correct the child's transgression schemes, but actually succumb to his provocation and satisfy his unconscious schemes. As long as our responses are based on our immediate impulses, we are more likely to fortify the child's mistaken attitudes than correct them.

8. Understanding The Child's Goal

Few adults are a match for the child who outwits them constantly. Without recognizing the child's goals, no one can successfully counter-act them.

9. Withdraw From Provocation, Not From The Child

Not falling for the child's provocations is an important counter measure with strong corrective effects. But silence when attention is sought and physical withdrawal in a power contest does not mean ignoring or neglecting the child, only his provocations.

10. Inducing Compliance And Respect

A child who does not listen to you is considered disobedient. Putting pressure on him to mind only intensifies his rebellion and brings more defeat. Refrain from putting pressure on the child to make him do what you want but at the same time avoid giving in to his persistent pressure.

11. Stimulating Independence

A so called "dependent" child who depends on others for help and assistance is always a demanding child. He usually uses his weakness to get undue service and attention. Never do for a child what he can do for himself.

12. Minimize Mistakes

We often over-estimate the significance of mistakes and devote an inordinate amount of time in trying to prevent or correct them. It is human to make mistakes, and only few have dangerous consequences. Emphasis on his mistakes has an inevitably discouraging effect on the child. One cannot build on weaknesses, only on strengths.

13. The Danger Of Pity

Children who experience tragedy are often less harmed by the consequence of such events and circumstances than by the pity and concern of well-meaning friends and relatives. Feeling sorry for the child is only natural but it can be very harmful if overdone and he begins feeling sorry for himself.

14. Non-interference In Children's Fighting

The child's ability to resolve his own problems is greatly hampered by your interference, and your efforts to solve them for him. Don't deprive children of their ability to resolve their own conflicts. In many cases, you actually stimulate them to fight more, since one or the other provokes the fights for your benefit in order to get you involved. When parents stay out of children's fights, they usually begin to get along much better.

15. Disregarding The Influence Of Other Adults

Other members of the family or others may influence the child. It is futile to try to change other influences. It is more important to fortify the child against them if they are detrimental. Use your own constructive influence then you need not worry what others may do to him.

One important safeguard is needed. Many parents try to "compensate" for what they think are the damaging influences on the part of another adult in the family, by going in the opposite direction. If father is too lenient, mother tends to be too strict, or vice versa. Such compensation does not correct the mistakes of others, but rather adds new mistakes to theirs. It does not fortify the child against wrong stimulations, but rather exposes him to additional disturbing influences.

Neither is it helpful to side with the child against whoever may do him wrong (e.g. problem with a teacher). This neither fortifies the child nor corrects mistaken impressions. One can and should show sympathy if he encounters unfair treatment but, if possible, he must learn to cope with it as part of the nature of living. Don't be over-protective.

16. The Child Must Learn To Accept The Established Order In The Family

The attitude of the mother to the child is the most important factor in his personality development. Her influence expresses itself mainly through her way of managing the total family situation. The child develops his personality in interaction with all the members of the family, and not exclusively with mother. The crucial point is the mother's ability or lack of it, to establish order. She must assist the child to accept this established order and fit in to the regular routine of everyday life with a minimum of conflict.

17. Having Fun Together

Win the child's cooperation by developing a good relationship based on mutual respect, on love and affection, on mutual confidence and trust. In the act of having fun together, all the above elements of a good relationship

come into play. It is impossible to have fun with anyone whom we don't like and respect. Playing together, working together, sharing interesting and exciting experiences all fall in this category of "having fun".

18. The Family Council

The growing rights which society gives children, and their awareness of their status as equals, makes it essential that they are accepted as equal partners in the affairs of the family. Equality in this sense does not mean identical function. Each family member has different functions but he or she must realize the greater responsibility which each one has for the welfare of the whole.

The family council gives every member of the family a chance to express himself freely in all matters pertaining to the family as a whole. He can object and criticize whatever he does not like, and seek solutions to his liking. At the same time he has to accept responsibility for what goes on in the family. It is truly education for democracy which the family council accomplishes and such educational experiences are equally important for the parents and for the children.

It requires considerable persistence, a willingness to see mistakes and to learn from them, the ability to change one's attitude and to respect those of the others, in order to make the family council a permanent and successful institution.

The following basic principles will help to facilitate the establishment and maintenance of a family council.

- (a) The council should meet at a regular designated hour, once a week, and not whenever one member of the family feels the need for it.
- (b) All members of the family are invited to participate on equal footing, each one having one vote.

- (c) The chairmanship rotates by plan either weekly or monthly so that every member of the family experiences this privilege and its responsibility.
- (d) Participation in the council sessions is not obligatory. But it is possible to get a reluctant member of the family, be it father or child, to attend the sessions, if his absence is utilized to reach decisions which he may not like, so that he will have to come to the following meeting to change the decision.
- (e) If the council is used by the parents to "explain" preach, scold, or impose their will in other ways on their children, then the council is not democratic and fails its purpose.
- (f) Maintenance of parliamentary provide each member with the opportunity to freely express himself, and with the obligation to listen to the others.
- (g) The family council should not be allowed to degenerate into a "gripe" session.
- (h) Most "urgent" decisions are not as urgent as parents or a child may be inclined to believe. All members of the family need to learn to have patience to function even under circumstances which are not to their liking.
- (i) The nature of decisions to be made by the council requires careful consideration. They should serve the benefit of all, and not any one particular interest.
- (j) Wrong decisions, on the part of the children, usually highly favorable as an educational experience. Instead of trying to prevent a wrong decision, parents should let the children experience the consequence.

- (k) Once a decision has been made, any alteration has to wait for next week's session. In the interim, no one has the right to decide a different course of action and to impose this decision on others.
- (l) The family council is the only "authority." No individual can lay down the law or make decisions for the others.
- (m) In a detached discussion of their problems, children are usually more reasonable than parents would assume. Only in the moment of conflict does a child appear unreasonable because he does not want to give in. An appeal to the child's good sense is more effective in the council discussion than an attempt to subdue him intellectually.
- (n) Even if the sessions of the council should not be effective for a period, they should not be discontinued.

The family council, properly used, can serve as a means of establishing family standards for all phases of life. A family code of ethics can become a living thing if it is established in a council.